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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [GA](#)
SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: ONGOING CONTROVERSY OVER PRESIDENT'S
HEALING POWERS

REF: A. BANJUL 70
[1](#)B. BANJUL 29

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

PRESIDENT CONTINUES TO TREAT HIV/AIDS, ASTHMA PATIENTS

[1](#)1. (SBU) Since mid-January, President Jammeh has maintained his weekly treatment program for HIV/AIDS and asthma patients (see refs a and b for background). The treatment program continues to receive lavish media attention, receiving top billing in the evening televised news broadcasts and in the pro-government daily, the "Daily Observer." Jammeh's self-proclaimed healing powers have also drawn foreign media attention; the British-based Sky News television network, in its February 20 news program, featured a story on Jammeh's treatment program following a visiting Sky journalist's interview with Jammeh.

THE CONTROVERSY ALSO CONTINUES

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Sky news feature, which conveyed a message of skepticism about Jammeh's self-proclaimed ability to cure HIV/AIDS, added more fuel to the controversy over his treatment program. In its lead item February 21, the "Daily Observer" branded the Sky report as "full of misinformation, lies, and absurdities," while asserting that "Jammeh's AIDS cure is real." Subsequently, on February 23, the paper led with an article attacking a Senegalese physician in Dakar, Coumba Toure Kane, who reportedly oversaw blood tests of Jammeh's initial HIV/AIDS patients. The journal accused Kane of "professional dishonesty" for reportedly asserting that the test results should not be interpreted as evidence that the patients had been cured. The "Daily Observer" article also contained a general anti-Senegalese swipe, as the author maintained that the physician's perceived downplaying of the test results' significance represented Senegalese "jealousy" that a HIV/AIDS cure had been found in neighboring Gambia.

SENIOR UN OFFICIAL EXPELLED

[1](#)3. (C) The controversy has claimed a prominent casualty, the senior resident UN official, Fadzai Gwaradzimba, head of the UN Development Program (UNDP) office here. On February 23, the "Daily Observer" reported that the GOTG had declared the UN official persona non grata because of her "irresponsible comments." While the paper did not elaborate, our sources confirm that she made her "irresponsible comments" in an interview with the visiting Sky journalist; the UN official stated, "if people start to believe there is a cure (for HIV/AIDS), they will start to engage in risky behavior and that could mean even more of a problem with AIDS on this continent." In conversation with Ambassador, British High Commissioner claimed that Jammeh himself, on learning of

Gwaradzimba's reported statement, had flown into a rage and demanded her immediate expulsion. We are told that the UN official departed The Gambia February 22.

COMMENT

¶4. (C) Jammeh shows no sign of halting his treatment program, and, given his iron-fisted control over Gambian officialdom, it is hard to imagine any official expressing reservations to him about the wisdom of continuing the treatment program. The Health Minister, a physician, has been particularly outspoken in support of Jammeh's initiative, repeatedly asserting that Jammeh's HIV/AIDS cure is genuine. At the same time, we do not rule out high-level foreign pressure on Jammeh to curtail his effort; the Nigerian High Commissioner told Ambassador that she planned to ask President Obasanjo to contact Jammeh and urge him to reconsider his HIV/AIDS treatment program. END COMMENT

UN CONTINGENCY GUIDANCE

¶5. (U) The local UNDP office shared with us its headquarters-approved contingency guidance on Jammeh's treatment program; we are e-mailing text to AF/W.
STAFFORD